

## The Good Shepherd

### Scripture – [Psalm 23](#)

I was standing in a long line at Sam's Club early Tuesday morning. I was on my weekly COVID-19 "hunting and gathering" expedition. Yes, to try and make this task less annoying, your pastor gave the task a Neanderthalic name... but the name has not helped. I still do not enjoy gathering food for the family!

Nonetheless, as I stood in line, it was impossible to not listen to a man who was standing two tape markers on the concrete away from me (12 feet away for those of you who are not getting out much in these times). No matter how hard I tried (and I honestly did try to bury my nose in my phone), I could not help but listen to him, because he most certainly wanted to be heard. He was announcing to the young couple behind me (who did everything they could to communicate that they did not want to listen to him either) that this "plague" was God's judgment on the world. Like in Moses' time, he said, when God judged the Egyptians for their sins by sending plagues upon them. This plague was God's judgment for the sins of America (abortion, homosexuality, globalism, and mixing of the races, were sins he mentioned that I can remember).

As I listened to what he said, I was not sure if I should get involved in this theological "monologue" or not. I have learned over the years that there is no "silver-bullet" argument that will silence a person and convert them to my way of thinking. So, unless I can devote a lot of time and energy to influencing someone's worldview, I often times just smile and go on about my business. But sometimes, knowing the power of the gospel, I step out and share my thoughts. This was not the time for the latter approach, but that was the approach I chose. My response to him was based in [Romans 8](#) and Psalm 23, I thought it was well thought out and fair. I didn't name call, just offered my interpretation as nothing more or less than that, my interpretation. It was 20 minutes until Sam's opened, and for the next 20 minutes I was berated for being a liberal, a heretic, and a few things of which I have no idea what they meant. But I listened respectfully, tried to de-escalate the situation, and then gladly headed into Sam's embarrassed and wishing I had kept my mouth shut.

After filling my cart with what I was instructed to fill it with (and a few other items as well!), I made my way to the check-out line. As I now stood in that line, glancing forward and occasionally at my phone, I heard someone say, "Thanks for sharing your thoughts!" I turned around and the nice young couple who had been between me and the other fellow, were now behind me in line. Apparently, they both grew up in the church, but no longer attended any church. Their parents tried to get them to attend church, but their parents had begun to sound more and more like the guy in the line. And frankly, they said, that is the only Christian voice they hear today. I first assured them that there were many Christian voices that did not reflect the hate of the man in line. And then, on a whim, I asked them what they liked relative to what I said. The second the question came out of my mouth, I wondered why and where did that come from?

To my delight, the young woman answered. She said they had been talking about what I said since they entered the store. The young man said he liked what I said from Romans 8. From Romans 8 I suggested that the clearest interpretation is not that God wills evil, but that God is sovereign over evil; meaning that when evil or suffering occur, God's will is focused on bringing good from the experience. She also referenced what I said from Psalm 23, that God walks with us through the dark valleys of death. In Psalm 23, it is clear that the walking through valleys of darkness or death is my walking, our walking, it is not God's will compelling us to walk through those places. Rather, God is simply present to comfort and guide us through those valleys.

Well needless to say, I left Sam's feeling better than when I had entered. I invited them to check out WRMC online. When I got home and started to turn my attention to writing this reflection, I was shocked to see that Psalm 23 and a passage from Exodus 2 were two of the lectionary readings for today. Many people today are asking questions regarding who is responsible for this virus? Some even suggest that this "plague" is from God. I'm not sure this is the right question to be asking, and I am even less sure that the answer is God! What I am confident of, however, is that God is walking with us. Comforting, strengthening, supporting, and empowering us every step of the way. God is with us and God will lead us to quiet waters and refresh our souls. I guess the next time we're in line, we should fear less and open our mouths, giving voice to our God!

